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ABSTRACT

An exploratory study focused on United States and Japanese college students' perceptions of their communication apprehension, willingness to communicate, and sense of humor in various communication situations. Subjects, 110 students selected from several scientific and technical communication classes at the University of Minnesota and 108 students from a psychology class at Kwansei Gakuin University, completed the Personal Reports of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Sense of Humor (SH) self-report measures. Results indicated significant differences between Japanese college students and United States students on all PRCA-24, WTC, and SH variables. Japanese students have (1) significantly higher PRCA-24 scores for dyadic, group, meeting, and public speaking, and composite variables; (2) significantly lower WTC percentages for dyadic, group, meeting, public speaking, composite, stranger, acquaintance, and friend variables; and (3) significantly higher Sense of Humor scores on liking of humor, sensitivity to humor, and coping humor than United States college students. (Contains 36 references and 6 tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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An Exploratory Study of Communication Apprehension, Willingness to Communicate and Sense of Humor between College Students from United States and Japan

By Earl E. McDowell and Noriko Yotsuyanagi

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study focuses on United States and Japanese college students' perceptions of their communication apprehension, willingness to communicate, and sense of humor in various communication situations. The results indicate that there are significance differences ($p < .0001$) between Japanese college students and United States college students on all Personal Report of Communication Apprehension variables (PRCA-24), Willingness to Communicate variables (WTC) and Sense of Humor variables (SH). Japanese students have (1) significantly higher PRCA-24 scores for dyadic, group, meeting, and public speaking, and composite variables, (2) significantly lower WTC percentages for dyadic, group, meeting, public speaking, composite, stranger, acquaintance, and friend variables, and (3) significantly higher Sense of Humor scores on liking of humor, sensitivity to humor, and coping humor than United States college students. These results, as well as differences between gender groups and correlational results, will be discussed in this article.

Communication apprehension refers to "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977; 1984). Payne and Richmond (1984) compiled a bibliography listing 876 books, articles, and papers on communication apprehension. They concluded that approximately 20 percent of the adult population in the United States have high or moderate communication apprehension. Klopf et al. (1995) reported that high apprehensives feel the fear (anxiety attack) in almost every oral communication encounter or expected encounter. The Japanese are especially stricken with fear (Klopf & Cambra, 1993).

Other studies have looked at communication apprehension and avoidance across cultures (Burroughs & Marie, 1990; McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun, & Richmond, 1990; Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988; McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985). The results revealed that there are significant differences both cross-culturally and intra-culturally in terms of communication apprehension. A summary table illustrates this point (Klopf, Ishii, & Cambra, 1995):

MEAN PRCA SCORES AND HIGH APPREHENSIVES

(percents by national group)

NATIONAL GROUP	MEAN SCORES	% HIGH CA
Australia	60.37	22.4%
Japan	65.90	35.9%
Korea	52.78	2.8%
Micronesia	60.78	22.8%
People's Republic of China	62.18	26.0%
Philippines	58.09	13.8%
Switzerland	65.85	30.4%
Twiwan	53.57	5.2%
United States	63.34	33.5%

High apprehensives equals percent scoring 70 and above

Communication avoidance refers to a "predisposition toward approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication" (McCroskey, 1992). Approach/avoidance tendencies has been labeled "willingness to communicate." McCroskey and Richmond (1990) asserted that the more apprehensive a person is the less willing he or she is to communicate. Their findings showed that approximately 20 percent of United States college students experience severe communication apprehension and avoidance difficulties.

Adults or college students who have high communication apprehensive and low avoidance scores might use humor to diffuse or decrease apprehension and increase willingness to communicate (Greenwood, 1977; Keller, 1984). Svebak (1974a; 1974b) suggested the sense of humor consists of the recognition of humor and the enjoyment of humor. Recognition of humor involves the ability to identify humorous intent and the ability to visualize the humor in various situations. Enjoyment of humor consists of a personal liking for humor and the enjoyment of the humorous role as played by oneself or others. Lefcourt and Martin (1986) reported that "coping humor" can be used to deal with stressful experiences and can be thought of as a dimension of sense of humor. Ruch and associates (Ruch, Ott, Accoce, & Bariaud, 1991) concluded that differences in reactions have been noted across cultures.

Research indicates that culture and communication are inextricably bound. That is, through communication humans acquire culture which influences the communication process (Barnlund, 1989). Hackman and Barthel-Hackman (1993) asserted that there is a powerful relationship between cultures and communication which makes it imperative that communication researchers seek cross-cultural comparison groups whenever possible when investigating key communication variables. Culture in persistent, enduring, and omnipresent (Porter & Samovar, 1982).

The United States and Japan

This study investigates possible differences in the level of apprehension, willingness to communicate, and sense of humor variables by focusing on individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Individualistic cultures place primary emphasis upon the individual's rights, needs, and behaviors and less importance upon the groups in which the individual belongs. Collectivistic cultures are those which place a high degree of importance upon group needs, goals, attitudes or values. Collectivistic cultures stress equality over equity (Leung, 1983). Triandis et al. (1990) and Kapoor et al. (1995) report that in collectivist cultures individual and group behavior is regulated by ingroup norms. Individuals living in an individualistic culture relate to the self-concept "I," while individuals living in a collectivistic culture relate to the concept "we" (Hofstede, 1984).

The United States is considered an individualistic culture. Innovation, creativity, and outspokenness are highly regarded in this culture. Japan, in contrast, is considered a collectivistic culture, and the emphasis is placed on group needs and goals with family loyalties, religious beliefs, and traditional values and less importance is placed on individual needs. Research indicates that Japanese do not value talkativeness and have high communication apprehension scores in both Japanese and English (McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishida, 1985). "When a person's goal is to assert him-or herself as a unique person (individualism), he or she must be direct so that others must know where he or she stands. If, on the other hand, a

person's goal is to maintain harmony in the in-group (collectivism) when he or she cannot be direct because he or she might offend someone" (Gudykunst and Nishida, 1994, pp. 40-41).

This study is designed to determine if Japanese college students have higher communication apprehension scores, lower willingness to communicate scores, and higher sense of humor scores than United States college students. The review of literature seems to indicate only marginal differences exist on composite Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) between Japanese and United States college students. Based on the review no previous research has been completed to determine differences between Japanese and United States college students in term of their willingness to communicate and humor variables. Thus, this is an exploratory study designed to determine what differences exist between Japanese and United States college students on these communication variables.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are listed below:

1. Will there be significant differences between college students from the United States and Japan in rating the PRCA-24 variables (dyadic, public speaking, group and meeting)?

2. Will there be significant differences between college students from the United States and Japan in rating the sense of humor variables (sensitivity to humor, liking of humor, and coping humor)?

3. Will there be significant differences between college students from the United States and Japan in rating willingness to communicate variable (dyadic, public speaking, group, meeting, stranger, acquaintances, and friend)?

4. Will there be significant differences between gender groups within and between countries on dependent measures?

5. Will there be significant relationships among the composite PRCA variable, composite willingness to communicate variable, sensitivity to humor, liking of humor, and coping with humor variables for Japanese college students?

6. Will there be significant relationships among the composite PRCA variable, composite willingness to communicate variable, sensitivity to humor, liking of humor, and coping with humor variables for United States college students?

METHODS

Subjects

Participants were 110 students (43% males and 57% females) selected from several scientific and technical communication classes at the University of Minnesota and 108 students (32% males and 68% females) from a psychology class at Kwansei Gakuin University. The anonymity of the students was guaranteed.

Measures

The Personal Reports of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Sense of Humor (SH) were the self-report measures used in this study. Noriko Yotsuyanagi translated the instruments into Japanese.

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) was used to index students level of apprehension in dyadic, group, meeting, public speaking and overall (composite) situations (McCroskey, 1982). There are six items for each communication context. The composite score was determined by adding the 24-items. The instrument has strong face validity and empirical validity and has consistently produced internal reliabilities in the .91 to .96 range. The internal reliability (Cronback Alpha) in this study was .91.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) scale measures the predisposition toward approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Although the scale consists of 20

items, only 12 items assess willingness to communicate in four contexts (dyadic, group, meeting, and public speaking) and with three types of receivers (stranger, acquaintance, and friend). The total score for the 12 items is used as the composite score. Research by McCroskey (1992) reports that various studies have found estimates of internal reliability ranging from .86 to .95. In this study the internal reliability (Cronback Alpha) for the composite scale is .89.

The *Sense of Humor* Questionnaire (SHQ) measures the liking of humor, sensitivity to humor, and coping humor. *Liking of Humor* consists of 7-items subscales from SHQ (Svebak, 1974a). Previous research by Lefcourt and Martin (1986) indicate that reliability estimates range from .60 to .75. The internal reliability in this study was .76.

The *Sensitivity to Humor* scale also was developed by Svebak (1974b). The scale also consists of 7-items and focuses on the subjects ability to recognize humor. The internal reliability (Cronback Alpha) in this study was .77.

The Coping of Humor scale was developed by Martin and Lefcourt (1983). The scale assesses the degree to which subjects make use of humor to cope with stressful events. In this study the internal reliability of the coping humor items was .69.

Statistical Analyses

Two-way analysis of variance were completed to determine differences between country groups (Japan and United States) and gender groups (male and female) and interaction effects of all dependent measures. If significant interaction effects occurred, the Scheffe method was used to determine between which cells significant occurred. One-way analysis of varianlce was completed to determine differences between gender groups in Japan and the United States. Correlational analyses were completed to determine relationships among dependent measures for both Japanese and United States college students.

RESULTS

The results, reported in Table 1, indicate that Japanese students are significantly more apprehensive ($p < .0001$) than United States students on all PRCA variables. United States students had a greater liking for humor and envisioned themselves as better able to recognize humor in situations than did Japanese students. In addition, United States students were significantly more ($p < .0001$) likely to use humor as a method for coping with stressful situations than were Japanese students (see Table 2). Likewise, Table 3 reveals a significantly greater percentage ($p > .0001$) of college students from the United States were willing to communicate in various communication situations, including talking to strangers, acquaintances, and friends.

Significant differences occurred between gender groups on the following PRCA variables: composite, group, meeting, public speaking ($p < .05$). Significant differences also occurred between gender groups on Liking (humor) variable ($p < 05$). In all cases females had significantly higher scores than males (see Table 4).

In addition, a significant interaction occurred between country and gender on the dyadic willingness to communicate score ($F= 5.654$; $p < .05$). The Scheffe results indicate significant differences ($p < .05$) occurred between United States female students ($X=74.75$ and United States male students ($X= 64. 74$), between United States female students and Japanese male students ($X= 62.40$), between United States female students and Japanese female students ($X= 59.76$). Other results indicate that no significant differences occurred between gender groups from the United States.

Significant differences, reported in Table 5, reveal that male Japanese students had significantly lower PRCA-group scores, PRCA-public speaking scores, and PRCA-meeting scores, as well as Liking (humor) scores, than Japanese female students.

The correlation results show that significant positive relationships exist between the composite PRCA scores and the composite willingness to communicate scores ($p < .05$) and significant negative relationships ($p < .01$) between composite PRCA variable and coping with humor (see Table 6). In addition, there are significant positive

relationships between the composite willingness to communicate scores and liking of humor scores ($p < .05$) and sensitivity to humor scores ($p < .10$).

In contrast, for the Japanese college group there is a significant negative correlation ($p < .001$) between the composite PRCA scores and composite willingness to communicate scores and significant negative relationship ($p < .001$) between the composite PRCA scores and coping with humor scores ($p < .001$). In addition, significant negative correlations exist between willingness to communicate scores and sensitivity of humor scores ($p < .001$), liking of humor scores($p < .05$), and coping with humor scores ($p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

An interpretation of the results indicates that United States college students are less apprehensive than Japanese college students. The researchers discovered that if the PRCA grand mean and standard deviation ($X=61.24$; $SD=12.37$) were used to classify subjects as high apprehensives, average apprehensives, and low apprehensives, approximately 50 percent of Japanese students would be classified as high apprehensive, while only 12 percent of United States students would be classified as high apprehensives. This finding is quite different than Klopf et al. (1995) reported. More research is needed to determine if the demographic are different in the two studies. In this study college students from western Japan and from central

United States completed the PRCA-24. It might be that Japanese students in western Japan are more apprehensive than Japanese students from other parts of Japan and that students from the central United States are less apprehensive than students in other parts of the country.

Similar results occurred when this procedures was used for PRCA-public speaking, PRCA-meeting, and PRCA-group variables. Previous research by McCroskey and his associates (McCroskey, Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994) seems to support their notion that cultural norms in Japan do not value talkativeness and that Japanese tend not to be outspoken. As indicated earlier Japanese live in a collectivistic culture. Thus, Japanese places a high degree of importance on group needs and less importance on the individual and stress equality over equity (Leung, 1983). Trandis et al. (1991) asserted that Japanese find their identities through membership in the groups to which they belong and subordinate individualism to group identity and goals. In contrast, as the researchers indicated earlier, the United States continues to be the most individualistic culture in the world. Hofstede (1984) stated that in the United States innovation, creativity, and outspokenness are highly regarded.

The results indicate that significant differences occurred between gender groups in Japan. The within country results reveal that female Japanese college students have significantly higher scores ($p < .01$) on the composite, group, meeting, and public speaking PRCA

variables than male Japanese college students. This seems to support the premise that Japanese males are the leaders in their country and that they play the dominant role in communication activities. Klopf and Camera (1993) asserted that millions of transactions occur daily in the business and professional world and highly apprehensive individuals are at a disadvantage. Richmond and McCroskey (1992) concluded that highly apprehensive people are perceived by employers as being less task attractive, and less socially adept, and are less likely to advance in the workplace.

No significant differences occurred between United States gender groups on dependent measures.

An interpretation of the sense of humor results reveals that Japanese students reported significant lower sensitivity for humor and liking of humor than students from the United States. Japanese students also indicated they were less likely to use humor to cope with stressful event than United States students. These results also can be explained by the collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In short, Japanese students seem to be saying that they do not wish to draw attention to themselves and would probably be uncomfortable using humor as a coping mechanism. United States students, however, probably use humor to cope with stressful situations.

Students who scored one standard deviation below the grand mean of composite PRCA scores and one standard deviation above the

mean on willingness to communicate liked humor, were sensitive to humor, and used humor as a coping mechanism. Seventy-six percent of these students were college students from the United States. In addition, 88 percent of these students would almost always talk to strangers and acquaintances, while only 7 percent of students with scores one standard deviation above the mean on composite PRCA scores would talk to strangers. These results are quite different from those reported by Hackman and Barthel-Hackman (1993). That is, students with low composite PRCA scores and high willingness to communicate scores were just as likely to rate humor variables highly and communicate with stranger and acquaintances as students with the same level of scores in the United States.

The correlation results, for the most part, do not support the Hackman and Barthel-Hackman (1993) study. These results can not be explained by the differences between the collectivistic and individualistic cultures. More research is need to understand these findings.

Overall, this study has focused on differences between college students from the United States and Japan in terms of their communication apprehension, willingness to communication, and sense of humor. More research should be completed on collectivistic and individualistic cultural groups. Intercultural communication is an important subject and scholars from different countries can work together to understand cultural differences.

Overall, the results reveal that approximately 50% of Japanese college students have high communication apprehension and low willingness to communicate scores. The apprehensive students do not like humor, do not have a sensitivity for humor, and have difficulty coping with humor. This study should be replicated with a larger sample of Japanese students. Assuming researchers obtain similar results as in this study, treatment programs might be introduced to help the 50 percent of Japanese students suffering from communication apprehension and unwillingness to communicate.

Booth-Butterfield and Cottone (1991) suggested that both instrumental and therapeutic approaches can be used to decrease apprehension and increase willingness to communicate.

Instructional approaches manipulate situational factors that elicit or sustain anxiety or avoidance. Visualization (Aryes & Hopf, 1989), structure (Booth-Butterfield, 1986), and self-disclosure ((Littlefield & Sellnow, 1987) can be used to lower apprehension and avoidance behaviors. In addition, Hackman and Barthel-Hackman (1993) suggested that therapeutic programs such as systematic desensitization, cognitive modifications, hypnosis, biofeedback and assertiveness training have been empirically demonstrated as effective in treating communication apprehension and avoidance difficulties (Allen, Hunter, & Donahue, 1989; Kelly, 1989; Watson & Dodd, 1984).

This exploratory study demonstrates the differences between Japanese and United States college students in terms of communication apprehension, willingness to communicate, and sense of humor. This study should be replicated with a larger sample of Japanese students. Treatment programs need to be developed to help apprehensive students in Japan.

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Table 1
Significant Differences between College Students
from the United States and Japan on PRCA-24 Variables

Country	Dependent Variables	X	Standard Deviation	F
U. S.	PRCA-Group	12.01	1.95	79.4*
Japan		17.7	4.93	
U.S.	PRCA-Meeting	12.85	3.17	69.45*
Japan		18.59	4.13	
U.S.	PRCA-Dyadic	12.19	3.36	17.29*
Japan		15.53	5.31	
U.S.	PRCA-PS	14.38	3.11	50.02*
Japan		19.98	5.29	
U.S.	PRCA-Composite	51.52	9.13	80.37*
Japan		70.81	14.19	

* $p < .0001$

Table 2

Significant Differences between College Students from the United States and Japan on Humor Variables

Country	Dependent Variables	X	Standard Deviation	F
U.S.	Sensitivity	12.50	2.00	251.09*
Japan		19.59	2.91	
U.S.	Liking	13.94	2.44	243.45*
Japan		20.34	2.42	
U.S.	Coping	15.03	6.46	9.79*
Japan		17.39	2.97	

* $p < .0001$

Table 3

Significant Differences Between College Students
from the United States and Japan
on Willingness to Communicate Variables

Country	Dependent Variable	X	Standard Deviation	F
U.S.	Dyadic	69.45	16.12	11.19*
Japan		60.63	15.15	
U.S.	Public Speaking	69.09	15.49	19.20*
Japan		54.52	21.16	
U.S.	Group	74.92	13.61	10.91*
Japan		60.23	18.47	
U.S.	Meeting	72.51	15.35	21.17*
Japan		57.89	20.04	
U.S.	Stranger	60.37	22.43	60.01*
Japan		35.45	16.75	
U.S.	Acquaintance	80.45	15.41	40.35*
Japan		59.98	20.36	
U.S.	Friend	91.21	10.82	12.27*
Japan		82.34	16.44	
U.S.	Composite	70.79	11.90	31.35*
Japan		59.86	14.85	

* $p < .0001$

Table 4

Significant Differences between Gender Groups on Dependent Measures

Gender	Dependent Variable	X	Standard Deviation	F
Male	PRCA	60.50	14.29	8.28*
Female	Composite	67.52	16.94	
Male	PRCA	14.32	3.81	12.72*
Female	Group	16.92	4.86	
Male	PRCA	15.22	4.555	11.54*
Female	Meeting	17.84	5.016	
Male	PRCA	16.67	4.139	9.954*
Female	Public Speaking	19.04	5.072	
Male	Liking	17.37	3.56	6.071*
Female		18.88	3.60	

*$p < .05$

Table 5

Significant Differences between Gender Groups from Japan on Dependent Measures

Gender	Dependent Variables	X	Standard Deviations	F
Male	Public Speaking	18.53	4.052	5.326*
Female	(PRCA)	20.56	4.622	
Male	Group	16.31	3.75	6.613*
Female	(PRCA)	18.52	4.516	
Male	Meeting	17.09	4.517	6.808*
Female	(PRCA)	19.45	4.525	
Male	Liking	19.70	2.146	5.465*
Female	(humor)	20.78	2.353	

Table 6

Correlations among Measures for United States (Above Diagonal) and Japan (Below Diagonal) College Students

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
PRCA-24	_	.27	.19	-.001	-.38*
Willingness to Communicate	-.44**	_	.17	.21	-.04
Liking of humor	-.15	-.23*	_	-.08	-.02
Sensitivity to Humor	.41**	-.57**	-.11	_	-.03
Coping Humor	-.42**	-.26	-.08	-.15	_

* $p < .05$ level
** $p < .01$ level